Nick Browne
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All Eyes on Anime

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Nick Browne's article *Eyes Open, Mouths Shut: A Study of Verbal and Sensory Storytelling in Japanese Animation* focuses on a question of great relevance to fans of the Japanese *anime* industry: whether there are any significant differences between *anime* adapted from different sources, be they *manga* (as is most common) or the serialized stories known as "light novels" (as is becoming increasingly common), as well as between those "original productions" with no source material. This is an issue that virtually everyone with an interest in film or television, not strictly *anime*, has considered at some point, as adaptations of books and comics are extremely common in the United States. Rarely, however, has anybody been able to come up with a satisfactory answer, with most instead making generalized and broad-sweeping statements, focusing on too many factors at once to be useful, or failing to acknowledge the risks of using too small a pool. Browne's analysis, while imperfect, solves this problem in part by admitting to its small scope and provisional nature, using a small sample size and choosing to focus on what he describes as the difference between "verbal" and "sensory" storytelling to make a successful if inevitably flawed argument.

After analyzing nine titles, Browne makes the tentative conclusion that *anime* not based on a preexisting source show a propensity for sensory storytelling while

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[1] Hehe.

those based on *manga* or light novels, surprisingly, showing nearly identical preferences for verbal storytelling. Although many potential problems, some of which he admits, exist, I see no obvious logical fallacies in his methods. His discussions, which examine the nine *anime* in depth while noting patterns among those in the same category, are detailed and informative, if sometimes lengthy. Having not seen some of these titles myself, I did appreciate his taking time to provide plot summaries and background for whatever characters he mentioned. I was, meanwhile, somewhat skeptical of his delineation between the two modes of storytelling at the start, but while I remain unsure of whether it is the most effective means by which to analyze these titles (though he himself admits that it is one of many), I see no inconsistency, as his examples were able to convince me that the use of vocal tone and a musical score functioned similarly to use of cinematography instead of being at all related to "verbal" means. Although I would have enjoyed seeing him discuss more examples, as Browne typically examines one-per-title, the size of the article unfortunately prevents this, and he draws enough parallels between the examples he does have for the analysis to be worthwhile.

As Browne himself admits, the study is limited in scope, which may ultimately decrease its significance but also saves it from the heavy generalization present in broader arguments. I have mixed feelings about his choice of titles, in spite of not having seen some of them, for while he indicates that he chose series directed at older men as a "control", he also admits that some of the original productions appear to be directed at older audiences in general rather than older men, as their mode of publication is less heavily categorized than *manga* or light

novels. I am not exactly sure of what standards aside from his own intuition he used to determine that a borderline title was acceptably similar to an anime based on a *seinen* series, and since some of these anime appear to be extremely experimental and difficult to classify it may be impossible to say which side of the line they lie on. Furthermore, the *anime* in question cross a fairly wide spectrum of genres, although I observed nothing indicating that his analysis of, say, a space opera (*Crest of the Stars),* was incompatible with that of what he calls a "deconstructed fantasy" (*Spice and Wolf),* his discussions focusing more on the *presentation* of the content than the content itself. Browne handles the rest of the limitations fairly: he wisely chooses not to discuss movies or direct-to-video films (known as "Original Animated Videos" in Japan), indicating that they possess different conventions, and uses the "official" North American translations as a control while still admitting that the problems of translating Japanese to English raise the possibility that some of his analysis is based on material added by North American Publishers, or that important information was lost in translation. One potentially glaring problem turns out to present an interesting possibility for further study, as Browne finds that two of the titles chosen, one based on a light novel and one based on a *manga*, function as original stories set within the universe of their source material rather than adaptations. Although this difference in function threatens to compromise his study, he uses it as an opportunity to question whether such retellings use sensory language to a greater extent, a question that is frustratingly unresolved here but which I would enjoy seeing him pursue in a later article. Indeed, this paper, while interesting on its own, is frustratingly full of potential follow-ups: a study that

includes increasingly-common adaptations of videogames, one of movies and OAVs, one of different demographics, or one focusing on aspects besides the one he covers here would all be welcome sequels.

In short, Browne's analysis is imperfect but fascinating, the paradigms he sets usable and the conclusion meaningful, if tentative. I will admit that I too am somewhat surprised that adaptations of *manga* did not show more of a penchant for sensory storytelling than adaptations of light novels, given the source material, but I found no reason to be skeptical of Browne's claims, at least regarding the titles in question. Whether his conclusions will hold when a larger pool is selected, or if he continues this study with one of his proposed follow-up studies, is a different question entirely.